

The Reappearance of *Lysandra bellargus* Rott., in the Chilterns

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On 16th Sept. 1979 I set out to search for Autumn Ladies Tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) in a field from which it had once been recorded at Turville, Bucks. Nearing the end of what proved to be a fruitless search, I was both surprised and pleased to see a male *Lysandra bellargus* Rott., at rest in the sun, and this was followed by two further specimens, both male. Returning on 28th September five more males and one female were observed, while on the following day, after a wait until the sun appeared, seven males were noted.

This particularly interested me since, in preparation for a lecture to the London Natural History Society, I had during the previous winter made many enquiries about the status of this species in England, and had, from the information received, concluded that it was extinct in Buckinghamshire. I half-expected, even so, the comment "Oh yes, it's always been there" when I reported my find to a number of people I expected would be interested, but none of them said it. On the suggestion of Mr. Brian Baker, of Reading Museum, I wrote to Mr. Tony Harman (1) who was once resident in the area for his observations. In an interesting reply he confirmed that, in his opinion *bellargus* "had long since disappeared" from the area in question, even though it used to be found commonly along with other chalk butterflies such as *Lysandra coridon* and *Cupido minimus*, both of which still occur. Indeed, he was in the area earlier and noted "more *coridon* than I have seen since the '50's".

It is possible that *L. bellargus* occurs at Watlington Hill, about 7 km. from the site in question, and Mr. Baker (2) reports that it has reestablished itself in a number of Thames Valley sites since the hot summer of 1976. This may bear out the suggestion of Muggleton (3) that *bellargus* only thrives in warm climates and that the ever-shortening and colder summers of recent years have caused its decline. It would be interesting to know if colonies in other parts of the country are increasing in numbers, and perhaps this is linked with the observations on *coridon* in the Turville area.

It would be even more interesting to know how such species recolonise an old, or spread to a new, locality. I do not believe the suggestion sometimes made that the species was always present, but in low density, and yet Ford (4) presents very good evidence that *Maniola jurtina* and *Polyommatus icarus* at least fly over a very restricted area, so that the spread of these species (and surely, therefore, many more like them) is exceedingly difficult to explain. The dispersal of a very large number of fertile females must surely be necessary to ensure that just one or two arrive in a suitable

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habitat for colonisation or recolonisation? Presumably this happens, yet observations of "stray" butterflies in unexpected places are few. For example, Harman (1) mentions one *Euphydryas aurinia*, Archer-Lock (5) records *Melanargia galathea* (in October), my son found *Strymonidia w-album* in the year of the drought (6), when unusual records were more frequent; I once recorded *Limenitis camilla* in London, when it was expanding its range everywhere (7) and *Lysandra coridon* flying along a lane some 500m. from its obvious place of origin and although there must be very many more sightings than these, I do not think they provide a satisfactory explanation for the spread of a butterfly such as *L. bellargus* which requires a specialised habitat and has only one foodplant, Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*). For a species such as *Pararge aegeria*, with a widely distributed foodplant and a less specialised habitat, a gradual encroachment on a broad front, as must have happened in Kent in the 1950's would certainly be possible, but I remain puzzled by the others. What do other readers think?

Postscript

In 1980, *bellargus* reappeared in even greater numbers, both in the first and second broods. And we found the Autumn Ladies Tresses!

References

- (1) Harman, T., 1979. Private Communication.
- (2) Baker, B., 1979. Private Communication.
- (3) Muggleton, J., 1973. Some Aspects of the History and Ecology of Blue Butterflies in the Cotswolds. *Proc. Brit. ent. nat. Hist. Soc.* 6 (3): 77-84.
- (4) Ford, E. B., 1945. *Butterflies*. Collins. pp. 272, 299.
- (5) Archer-Lock, A., 1979. Bagpipes and Cider. *Ent. Rec.*, 91: 212.
- (6) Showler, A., 1977. Observations in 1976. *Ent. Rec.*, 99: 85.
- (7) Showler, A., 1956. The Macrolepidoptera of Abbey Wood. *Ent. Rec.*, 68: 124 et seq.

FERAL RHODOMETRA SACRARIA L. DISCHARGING MECONIUM.
— On the evening of 2nd July 1980, I ran a small nine inch actinic blue light tube in the East Blean area of Kent. Amongst a number of insects attracted was a fresh specimen of the Vestal (*R. sacraria*). It was interesting that when put into a one inch tube it ejected meconium, suggesting the likelihood that the moth had bred in the wood or nearby.
— E. S. BRADFORD, 82 Garston Lane, Garston, Watford, Herts WD2 6QR.

THE SLENDER BURNISHED BRASS: DIACHRYSLIA ORICHALCEA F. — A male specimen of this rare migrant was taken by myself at Lymington, Hants at m.v. light on the night of the 5th September 1980. — A S. HARMER, 'Covertside', Sway Road, Lymington, Hants, SO4 8MN.

THE SILVER-STRIPED HAWKMOTH: HIPPIOTON CELERIO L. IN YORKSHIRE. — My friend A. S. Ezard took a fine male of this scarce migrant in his garden trap at Rudston in East Riding, on the 19th September 1980. — P. Q. WINTER, West End Farm, Muston, Filey, N. Yorkshire.